

**MODULAR COUNTERWEIGHT APPARATUS
FOR AN ORBITAL ABRADING MACHINE**

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates generally to an apparatus for balancing an orbital abrading machine. More particularly, the present invention apparatus relates to balancing an orbital abrading machine while the machine is operating under load. The present invention apparatus includes a counterweight element that can be readily detached and replaced to enable the balancing of the machine under different loading conditions.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Orbital abrading machines are well-known and generally comprise a portable, manually manipulatable housing, a motor supported by the housing and having or being coupled to a drive shaft driven for rotation about a first axis, and an assembly for mounting a pad for abrading a work surface for orbital movement about the first axis. In a random orbital abrading machine, the assembly serves to additionally mount the pad for free rotational movement about a second axis, which is disposed parallel to the first axis.

[0003] The assembly typically includes a head portion coupled for driven rotation with the drive shaft about the first axis and defining a mounting recess having an axis arranged coincident with the second axis, a bearing supported within the mounting recess, and means for connecting the pad to the bearing for rotation about the second axis.

[0004] An orbital machine having an element, such as pad, driven for movement about an orbital path of travel is by nature unbalanced and tends to produce vibrations, which may be felt by the hands of an operator of the machine. With a view towards maintaining such vibrations at acceptable levels, it has been common practice to employ a counterbalance system of the type described in Chapter 12 Mechanisms and Dynamics of Machinery, Third Edition, by Hamilton H. Mabie and Fred W. Ocvirk, published by John Wiley and Sons, which is incorporated by reference herein. The aforementioned design approach, commonly referred to as "dynamic" balancing, accounts only for the unbalance which is created by the mass centers of the pad and portions of the assembly not disposed concentric to the first axis. Dynamic

balancing adds counterweight masses to the housing that are symmetrically positioned with respect to a radial plane of the second axis.

[0005] Dynamic balancing can create a machine that is balanced, that is, has acceptably low vibration levels, while the machine is running at free speed in an unloaded condition. However, once the machine is loaded, as a result of placing the pad in abrading engagement with a work surface, additional forces are introduced and the machine becomes unbalanced. This unbalance is detected by the operator in the form of vibration. This vibration is undesirable and in severe cases, may lead to vibration-induced injuries such as carpal tunnel syndrome and white finger.

[0006] An improved design approach shown in commonly assigned United States Patent No. 6,206,771 (Lehman), which is incorporated by reference herein, and which is hereinafter referred to as Lehman, employs counterbalancing in such a manner as to minimize vibrations under actual working conditions. However, the counterbalancing disclosed in Lehman is only effective for predetermined operating conditions.

[0007] What is needed then is a convenient and cost-effective means of balancing an orbital abrading machine to minimize vibrations associated with a wider variety of abrading operations.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0008] It is known that both orbital and random orbital abrading machines, which include for example, sanding, grinding, and buffing machines, may be counterbalanced in such a manner as to minimize vibrations under actual working conditions. Further, it is known to employ a counterbalancing system adapted to minimize vibration of an orbital abrading machine under predetermined operating conditions.

[0009] The present invention relates to an improved, orbital abrading machine, and more particularly to an improved random orbital buffer, which may be more readily counterbalanced to provide effective dampening of vibrations under a wider variety of actual working conditions. The present invention can include a variety of replaceable counterweight modules respectively configured for different set of operating conditions, for example, the use of different diameter buffering pads with an orbital buffer.

[0010] The present invention head portion for counterbalancing a random orbital machine includes a first element adapted for connection to a drive means for the machine and for connection to an abrasive pad assembly. The drive means is rotatable about a first axis of rotation and the abrasive pad assembly is rotatable about a second axis of rotation that is parallel to the first axis of rotation and lying within a plane common with the first axis. The head portion also includes a second element detachably connected to the first element. The first and second elements are configured to at least substantially counterbalance portions of the abrasive pad assembly not disposed concentrically of the first axis of rotation and forces to which the abrasive pad assembly is exposed during use as a result of the abrasive pad assembly engaging with a work surface.

[0011] A general object of the present invention is to provide an apparatus to facilitate the counterbalancing of an orbital abrading machine under a wide range of loaded conditions.

[0012] Another object of the present invention is to provide an apparatus having a multiplicity of readily installed counterbalancing elements, where each element is configured for a particular set of operating conditions such as size or type of abrading pad.

[0013] These and other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will become readily apparent to those having ordinary skill in the art upon a reading of the following detailed description of the invention in view of the drawings and claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0014] The nature and mode of operation of the present invention will now be more fully described in the following detailed description of the invention taken with the accompanying drawing Figures in which:

Figure 1 is an exploded prospective view of a random orbital abrading machine embodying the present invention;

Figure 2 is an exploded prospective view of a prior art random orbital abrading machine embodying a counterbalancing means for operation under a loaded condition;

Figure 3 is a balance sketch illustrating a prior art mode of counterbalancing an orbital abrading machine for operation under a loaded condition;

Figure 4 is a plan view of the counterweight shown in Figure 1;

Figure 5 is a perspective view showing further detail of the head portion and portions of the assembly shown in Figure 1;

Figure 6 is a side view of the head portion and portions of the assembly shown in Figure 5; and,

Figure 7 is a partial cross-sectional view of the random orbital abrading machine of Figure 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0015] At the outset, it should be appreciated that like drawing numbers on different drawing views identify substantially identical structural elements of the invention. While the present invention is described with respect to what is presently considered to be the preferred embodiments, it is understood that the invention is not limited to the disclosed embodiments.

[0016] Furthermore, it is understood that this invention is not limited to the particular methodology, materials and modifications described and as such may, of course, vary. It is also understood that the terminology used herein is for the purpose of describing particular embodiments only, and is not intended to limit the scope of the present invention, which is limited only by the appended claims.

[0017] Unless defined otherwise, all technical and scientific terms used herein have the same meaning as commonly understood to one of ordinary skill in the art to which this invention belongs. Although any methods, devices or materials similar or equivalent to those described herein can be used in the practice or testing of the invention, the preferred methods, devices, and materials are now described.

[0018] Reference is first made to Figure 1, which is an exploded prospective view of a random orbital abrading machine **10** embodying the present invention. An orbital abrading machine is generally designated as **10** and shown as generally including a manually manipulated housing **12** and a motor **14** mounted within the housing and including or being suitably coupled to a threaded drive shaft **16** driven for rotation about a first axis of rotation **18**. An abrasive pad assembly **20** includes an abrasive pad **22** and is connected to drive shaft **16** such that the pad is caused to orbit about the first axis **18**.

[0019] Preferably machine 10 is in the form of a random orbital machine in which an abrasive pad assembly 20 includes an abrasive pad 22 supported by the remainder of abrasive pad assembly 20 for free rotational movement about a second axis 24, which is disposed parallel to and orbits about first axis 18. Motor 14 may be a pneumatically driven motor connected to a suitable supply of air under pressure.

[0020] Figure 2 is an exploded prospective view of a prior art random orbital abrading machine embodying a counterbalancing means for operation under a loaded condition. Figure 2 is a representation of Figure 1 from Lehman. Lehman takes into consideration forces at work, during actual working conditions, which oftentimes result in a properly balanced machine becoming unbalanced to an unacceptable degree during use. These forces include the moment associated with masses not concentric with the first axis of rotation noted above, and forces to which an abrasive pad for the machine is exposed during use as a result of the abrasive pad engaging with a work surface, for example, sanding or buffing the surface. As a result of these considerations, Lehman provides a head portion 130 that balances the machine while the machine is subjected to predetermined working conditions, under which the machine is intended for use, so as to minimize vibrations to which an operator is exposed while actually using the machine for performing a given type of abrading operation.

[0021] The following should be viewed in light of Figures 1 and 2. In general terms, abrasive pad assembly 20 in Figure 1 may be similar to assembly 120 in Figure 2. Further, head portion 30 acts as a counterweight to balance machine 10 under load, much like head portion 130 balances machine 110. However, unlike the one-piece head portion 130 shown in Figure 2, head portion 30 includes two elements, adapter 32 having a face 33, and interchangeable counterweight 34. Adapter 32 and interchangeable counterweight 34 are further described below.

[0022] Returning to Figure 1, adapter 32 is mechanically coupled to or formed integrally with drive shaft 16. Abrasive pad assembly 20 includes interface pad 38, to which pad 22 is attached, interface pad mounting plate 40, fasteners 41, bearings 42, and bearing spacer 44. Pad 38 is connected to plate 40 by fasteners 56 in conjunction with washers 58. Mounting pad 40 includes a recess 45, sized to mount bearings 42. Bearings 42 serve in turn to support means for connecting pad 22 to bearing 42, such as may be defined by threaded interface pad mounting

plate retaining shoulder bolt 46 passing through interface pad mounting pad 40, bearings 42 and bearing spacer 44. Bolt 46 is disposed for rotation concentrically about axis 24. Adapter 32 is formed with a threaded orifice, which is designated as 66 only in Figure 7, to accept bolt 46. This orifice has an axis disposed coincident with second axis 24. Also shown in Figure 1 are guard 48, having an opening 50 sized and configured to pass drive shaft 16, and fasteners 52 used to fasten guard 48 to housing 12. It is understood that guard 48 can take more than one shape and that such shape is not germane to the invention. In addition, fasteners 41, 52, and 56 and washers 58 can take any form known in the art, and that the type of fasteners 41, 52, or 56 or washers 58 used is not germane to the invention. It is further understood that, in general, other configurations of assembly 20 are possible and that such configurations are not germane to the invention. That is, the head portion 30 can be configured to counterbalance vibrational forces associated with any typical configuration of assembly 20. Spacers 54 with a thickness 55 are used to separate adapter 32 and counterweight 34.

[0023] Lehman noted that the dynamic balancing technique for orbital machines, described *supra*, did not take into account working loads, such as drag caused by bearing engagement of the abrading or buffing pad with a surface. Lehman further noted that it was necessary to consider the angular velocity of masses associated with the buffer in order to determine the values and positions required to be assumed by balancing masses in order to achieve balance under actual working conditions.

[0024] With certain orbital machines, such as sanders, the degree of unbalance, and thus vibration experienced by an operator under typical working conditions, is normally found to be within acceptable limits. However, for other orbital machines, such as for example, buffers, the degree of unbalance is typically found to be greater and may reach a level at which prolonged use of the machine may cause serious vibration induced injury to an operator.

[0025] Figure 3 is a balance sketch illustrating a prior art mode of counterbalancing an orbital abrading machine for operation under a loaded condition. Figure 3 is a representation of Figure 3 from Lehman. Figure 3 and TABULATION II (not shown) in Lehman illustrate the approach used in Lehman to determine counterweights for an orbital or random orbital machine, which is adapted to be balanced while subjected to predetermined working conditions under which the machine is intended for use. The counterweights are determined so as to minimize

vibrations to which an operator is exposed, while actually using the machine for performing a given type of abrading operation.

[0026] The following should be considered in light of Figures 2 and 3. Figure 3 and TABULATION II take into consideration torque applied to pad 122 in opposition to the driven rotation of assembly 120 about axis 118 under a predetermined working condition. The figure and tabulation also account for the angular velocity of masses associated with the assembly 120 (m_1 and m_2) and the ‘unloaded’ state counterweights (m_A^1 and m_B^1). As a result, the sizes and angular orientations of masses m_A^1 and m_B^1 , relative to a plane, such as may be conveniently defined by a working surface of pad 122 to be presented for abrading engagement with a work surface (not shown), required to balance the sample machine under a predetermined working condition, differ from the size and orientation of masses m_A^1 and m_B^1 previously determined by Lehman to be required to balance such machine while in an unloaded condition, that is, dynamic balancing as described *supra*. The drag force lies within the previously mentioned reference plane, that is, the surface of pad 122 disposed in abrading engagement with the work surface, and passes through the center of pad 122 tangential to the orbital path of such center about axis 118. It is important to note that masses m_A^1 and m_B^1 in head portion 130 are not symmetrically located with respect to the second axis of rotation. That is, if m_A^1 is positioned on a plane parallel to the second axis of rotation and intersecting the second axis of rotation, m_B^1 will not be positioned on this plane. This asymmetrical configuration is illustrated in Figure 5b (not shown) from Lehman. That is, m_A^1 and m_B^1 and the second axis are not collinear, unlike in the dynamic approach noted *supra* and illustrated in Figure 5a (not shown) in Lehman. Hereinafter, the above-described asymmetrical relationship of m_A^1 and m_B^1 is referred to as the offset of m_A^1 and m_B^1 .

[0027] The counterweight masses m_A^1 and m_B^1 , the mass and location of which have been determined as described in Lehman, are integral to head portion 130. Thus, a particular head portion 130 cannot be adapted to changing conditions, and is therefore, only effective for a particular set of operating conditions. As a result, if operating conditions are outside the conditions for which a particular head portion 130 has been configured, the head portion must be replaced with another head portion suitable for the new set of conditions. For example, switching from an 8-inch buffering pad to an 11-inch buffering pad could alter operating conditions

sufficiently to create undesirable vibrational forces in an orbital machine. Unfortunately, to replace head portion **130**, the head portion **130** must be disconnected from the drive shaft, which may be a burdensome task in the field.

[0028] The following should be considered in light of Figures 1 and 3. To provide counterbalancing responsive to a wider set of operating conditions, the present invention uses head portion **30** including adapter **32**, and interchangeable counterweight **34**. The methodology shown in Figure 3 and TABULATION II is used to determine the mass, shape, and relative positions of adapter **32** and counterweight **34** for a baseline set of conditions. However, as noted above, when actual operating conditions vary too widely from the baseline conditions, adapter **32** and counterweight **34** will provide diminished vibration reduction. Therefore, for a set of operating conditions outside the baseline conditions, the mass and position of adapter **32** are held constant (so that adapter **32** can be left connected to the drive shaft) and the configuration of counterweight **34** is modified to provide the necessary counterbalancing. Thus, while keeping adapter **32** as a constant with respect to counterbalancing calculations, a multiplicity of counterweights **34** are configured to provide the counterbalancing needed for a corresponding multiplicity of working conditions. For example, one counterweight **34** can be configured for an 8-inch buffering pad and another counterweight **34** can be configured for an 11-inch buffering pad.

[0029] Figure 4 is a plan view of the counterweight **34** shown in Figure 1. The following should be considered in light of Figures 1 through 4. The offset of m_A^1 and m_B^1 is implemented in head portion **30**. For purposes of discussion, m_A^1 is assumed to be part of adapter **32** and m_B^1 is assumed to be part of counterweight **34**. However, it should be understood that other configurations of m_A^1 , m_B^1 , adapter **32**, and counterweight **34** are possible, and that such configurations are within the spirit and scope of the invention as claimed. In one embodiment, adapter **32** is formed having the substantially circular perimeter and face **33** as shown in Figure 1. In this embodiment, cross-sections of adapter **32** taken parallel to face **33** are uniform. Then, counterweight **34** is formed such that m_B^1 is asymmetrical with respect to m_A^1 in the abovementioned reference plane.

[0030] One approach for obtaining the above asymmetry for m_B^1 is shown in Figure 4, in which counterweight **34** is formed with an initial planar symmetry with respect to a point **64**. Then, section **62** is removed, resulting in an asymmetrical shape for counterweight **34** with

respect to point 64. Thus, when counterweight 34 is connected to adapter 32, the resulting head portion 30 has the required offset of m_A^1 and m_B^1 . The amount of asymmetry in counterweight 34 can be controlled by the size of section 62 removed from the counterweight. It should be readily apparent to one skilled in the art that other combinations of symmetry for adapter 32 and counterweight 34 are possible and are within the spirit and scope of the invention as claimed. For example, adapter 32 could be formed with non-uniform cross-sections with respect to face 33. Also, the asymmetry of counterweight 34 could be provided by varying the density, rather than the shape of counterweight 34. For example, looking at Figure 4, section 62 could be left on counterweight 34 and then beginning at edge 68 and moving toward edge 70, counterweight 34 could be formed with progressively increasing or decreasing density.

[0031] Figure 5 is a perspective view showing further detail of the head portion 30 and portions of the assembly 20 shown in Figure 1.

[0032] Figure 6 is a side view of the head portion 30 and portions of the assembly 20 shown in Figure 5. The following should be considered in light of Figures 5 and 6. Counterweight 34 is attached to adapter 32 with bolts 48 that pass through holes 60 in counterweight 34 and thread into adapter 32. Spacers 54 separate adapter 32 and counterweight 34. Thus, bolt 46 can be removed from adapter 32 and plate 28 removed from bolt 46 to expose bolts 48. Then, bolts 48 can be removed, releasing counterweight 34. It should be readily apparent to one skilled in the art that other means known in the art can be used to attach counterweight 34 to adapter 32, and such means are within the spirit and scope of the invention as claimed. For example, combinations of pins, holes, interlocking features, clips, or threaded fasteners could be used.

[0033] Thickness 55 of spacers 54 determines the separation between adapter 32 and counterweight 34. This separation can affect the counterbalancing effects of head portion 30. Although such affects are not described herein, it should be understood that the calculation of such effects, and the modification of head portion 30 in response to such calculations, is within the spirit and scope of the invention as claimed.

[0034] Figure 7 is a partial cross-sectional view of the random orbital abrading machine 10 of Figure 1. Figure 7 is provided to illustrate machine 10 in the assembled configuration. Figure 7 shows the connection of drive shaft 16 with adapter 32 and the connection of bolt 46

with threaded orifice **66** in adapter **32**. Also, the offset between axis **118** and **124** is clearly shown.

[0035] Thus, it is seen that the objects of the present invention are efficiently obtained, although modifications and changes to the invention should be readily apparent to those having ordinary skill in the art, which modifications are intended to be within the spirit and scope of the invention as claimed. It also is understood that the foregoing description is illustrative of the present invention and should not be considered as limiting. Therefore, other embodiments of the present invention are possible without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention.